

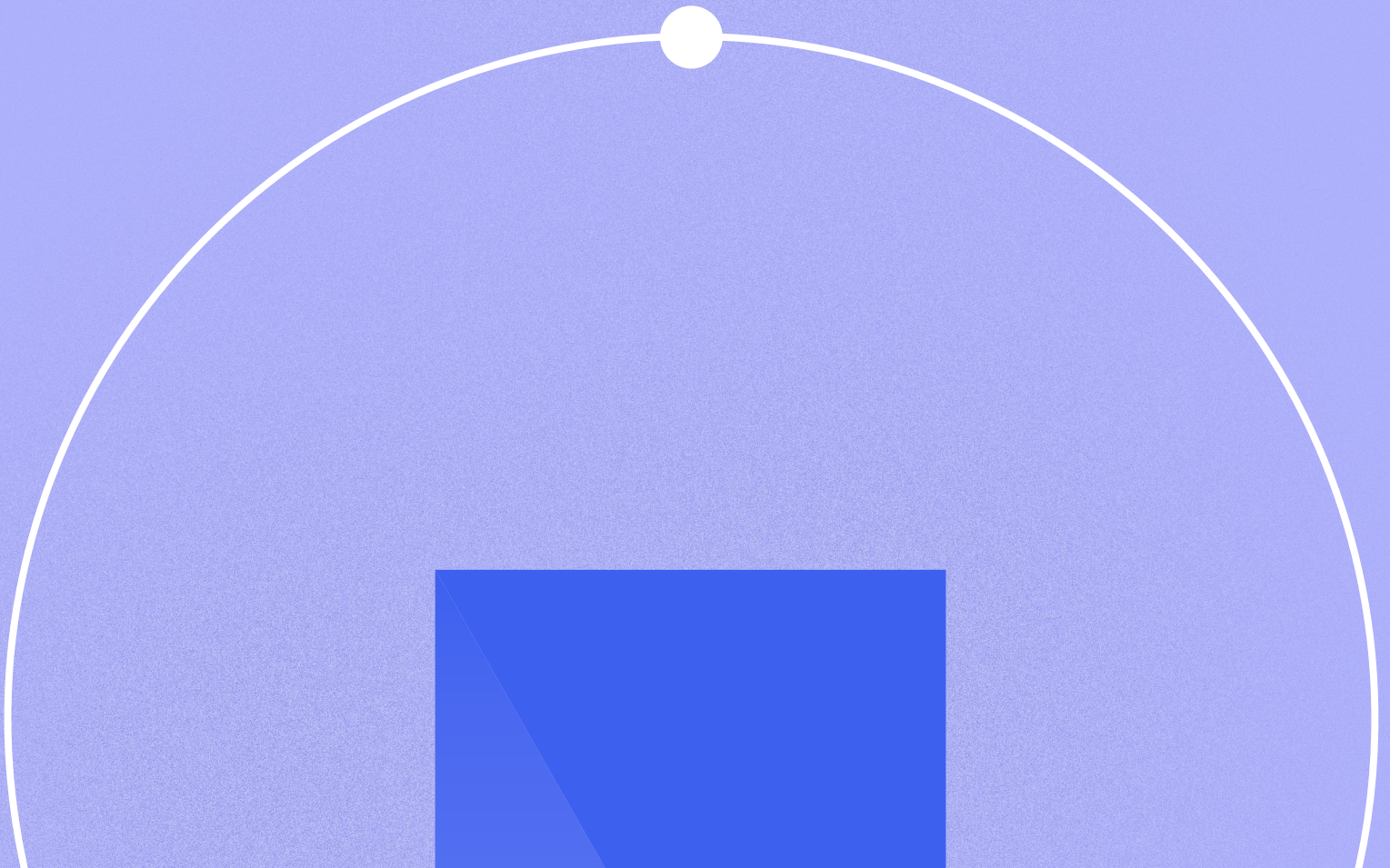


Century  
Initiative | Initiative  
du Siècle

# Growing Smarter

The case for a national smart  
growth framework

OCTOBER 2024







## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

Century Initiative extends its sincere thanks to the members of the [National Expert Panel](#) for their invaluable insights, expertise, and thoughtful feedback in shaping this paper. We are also deeply grateful to our donors and partners, whose steadfast support enables us to continue our vital work—more details are available in our [latest annual report](#). Additionally, we would like to acknowledge the exceptional design assistance provided by Sandbox Inc.



## ABOUT CENTURY INITIATIVE

---

Century Initiative (CI) is a national, non-partisan charity with a mission to enhance Canada's long-term prosperity, resiliency, and global influence by responsibly growing the population of Canada to 100 million by 2100. As part of its mandate to improve understanding and identify solutions, CI supports an active research program that includes the flagship [Scorecard](#), as well as other focused [research reports](#) with expert partners.

[www.centuryinitiative.ca](http://www.centuryinitiative.ca) | [info@centuryinitiative.ca](mailto:info@centuryinitiative.ca)

Canadian charitable number: BN 843519638 RR0001




# Canada needs a framework for smart growth

There is no question that Canada needs more people. As the country joins the “lowest low” fertility countries,<sup>1</sup> our population is projected to age with the number of dependents for each Canadian of working age continuing to climb. How much it climbs is shaped by policy choices – in the next generation seniors are projected to increase from 19 to 26 per cent of the population in a fast-aging scenario or to 20 per cent in a slow-aging scenario.<sup>2</sup> To opt out of population growth driven by immigration is to opt for an older and poorer country cut off from the world.

But there are important choices to be made about how we pursue and support that growth. We face a fork in the road: we can choose to plan for growth that builds shared prosperity and sustainable services and infrastructure; or we can choose reactive approaches that put economic potential and essential services at risk. We need to plan for these changes starting today because we are already feeling their impacts, with regions from coast-to-coast-to-coast experiencing significant change.

Canada urgently needs an effective **framework** for population growth that ensures smart, integrated, and long-term planning. That includes the design and management of pathways for immigrating to Canada, but it also means making two-way connections to policy areas and across levels of government. Areas like housing, infrastructure, health care, and community services need to scale along with population needs and, in turn, population growth strategies need to support these priorities, alongside the federal-provincial-municipal-Indigenous relationships that are essential to progress.

Canada’s economic future depends on doing this well. Between a shrinking working-age population, relatively low use of technology by Canadian firms, and limited investments in innovation, research, and development, our productivity is declining.<sup>3</sup> Strategic population growth that builds our economy, rather than strains it, will strengthen Canada’s economic capacity and in turn enhance the standard of living for all residents.

 **Canada urgently needs an effective framework for population growth that ensures smart, integrated, and long-term planning**

Century Initiative tracks many of these core indicators of prosperity in our National Scorecard on Canada’s Growth and Prosperity. The 2024 edition of the scorecard was a wakeup call – of 40 indicators, Canada’s performance was rated as “falling behind” in 8 and another 23 were rated as “needs attention”.<sup>4</sup>

Canada’s ability to welcome newcomers is a clear area of strength. But the absence of an integrated framework has recently created pressures in other areas (e.g., housing), and governments’ rush to respond to those pressures has featured short-term measures with long-term consequences (e.g., the impact of temporary resident measures on the post-secondary education sector). Amplified by longstanding service and infrastructure pressures, there are signs that the longstanding Canadian consensus in support of immigration may be starting to fray.<sup>5</sup>

1 The Daily – Births and Stillbirths, 2023,” accessed September 25, 2024, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240925/dq240925c-eng.htm>.


2 “Projected Population, by Projection Scenario, Age and Gender, as of July 1,” accessed September 25, 2024, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710005701>

3 Century Initiative, “National Scorecard on Canada’s Growth and Prosperity - 4th Edition,” 2024.

4 Century Initiative.

5 Century Initiative, “Public Opinion & Immigration: Maintaining Canada’s Advantage,” 2023, [www.centuryinitiative.ca](http://www.centuryinitiative.ca)

A framework for smart growth is not just an opportunity to respond to near-term challenges but to embrace an abundance agenda for the long-term. A smart growth framework should address the unintended consequences that can come from a disconnection between immigration and service and infrastructure planning and among intergovernmental responsibilities. But it should also treat growth not as a problem to be managed but an opportunity to be seized.

 **A smart growth framework should treat growth not as a problem to be managed but an opportunity to be seized**

At Century Initiative, we believe that now is the time to build a smart growth framework. The framework should be led by the federal government, in partnership with provinces and territories, Indigenous governments, local governments, and the private and community sectors. Pursuing a smart growth framework is not about choosing one or another population growth target, it's about making sure that the growth that we expect and need is set up for success, both for now and future generations.

To support that conversation, this paper highlights some lessons from growth frameworks internationally and within Canada and sets out potential principles to guide a smart growth framework for Canada.

---

## A smart growth framework can support better planning and better outcomes

Smart growth requires a clear vision, long-term planning, and collective efforts across sectors and policy domains. Infrastructure and human capital are generational developments. But today decision-making around the contributors to smart growth are predominantly made in reactive modes on short cycles and isolated from each other. This is true even *within* governments, before taking into account the roles of different levels of government and different sectors.

One example of this at play is with international students. Post-secondary institutions, regulated by provinces, made decisions to pursue growth in their numbers of international students. This was done in isolation from local and provincial housing and planning targets, leading to pressure on local housing markets, along with local

services and other protections.<sup>6</sup> In turn, at the federal level, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada has made a series of changes to reduce the number of student visas, creating sudden changes for institutions, students, and their communities.

These sudden swings responding to near-term priorities do not serve Canada's long-term prosperity well. A smart growth framework can help coordinate directions and investments across policy areas and support policymakers and other stakeholders to incorporate a long-term vision for prosperity into their work. This isn't about centralizing decision-making but in finding opportunities to share data, long-term plans, and objectives across different decision-makers and sectors.

---

<sup>6</sup> Rachel Battaglia, "Proof Point: International Student Cap Won't Immediately Cut Rental Demand in Canada," 2024, <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/proof-point-international-student-cap-wont-immediately-cut-rental-demand-in-canada/>.

# What do smart growth frameworks look like in practice?

Implementing a smart growth framework for Canada will need to look different depending on the policy area. For example, a framework that connects immigration and housing needs to take into account the roles of federal and provincial immigration policies, measures to encourage new housing supply, local planning and demographic projections, and the role of the private sector that builds the vast majority of housing in Canada. Other dimensions feature fewer actors and moving parts.

Looking across international examples of growth frameworks (such as the Regional Australia Institute's *Regionalisation Ambition 2032*, Scotland's *A Scotland for the Future*, or Japan's *Regional Empowerment* strategy) as well as provincial strategies (e.g. New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island), there are some common features and goals that point to where a national framework could go.





## COMMON FEATURES

Some common elements of population growth frameworks include:

Features	Examples
<b>Targets and metrics:</b> Many growth frameworks feature a mix of targets and progress metrics, looking not only at demographics but also economic and social outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In <b>New Zealand</b>, the <b>Auckland Plan 2050</b> outlines a monitoring framework of 33 measures, including sense of community, use of public transport, air quality, and access to internet.<sup>7</sup></li> <li>In <b>Australia</b>, the Tasmanian Government's population policy includes a list of measurable actions (each with a lead department), a public population data dashboard, and an under-development evaluation framework of economic, social, and environmental indicators.<sup>8</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Broad prosperity and quality of life goals:</b> Growth frameworks generally feature an array of goals focused on economic prosperity and quality of life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Scotland's</b> strategy features "a family friendly nation" and a "healthy living society" among its four building blocks.<sup>9</sup></li> <li><b>Australia's</b> Regionalisation Ambition 2032 includes "liveability" as one of its five pillars, with targets for life satisfaction, digital inclusion, and access to cultural and recreation activities.<sup>10</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Core pillars with concrete actions:</b> Most frameworks or strategies feature 4-6 main pillars, with actions plans under each that reflect roles for different actors inside and outside of government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>New Brunswick</b> has a higher-level population growth strategy complemented by action plans for each of the strategy's core objectives (e.g., attract a skilled workforce, recruit entrepreneurs).<sup>11</sup></li> <li><b>Prince Edward Island's</b> framework identifies five key priorities for sustainable growth (e.g., expanding critical infrastructure and public services, supporting land-use planning and environmental sustainability) and links each one to provincial initiatives.<sup>12</sup></li> <li><b>Newfoundland and Labrador's</b> strategy is built around four action plans in line with population growth priorities: workforce development, families, communities, and immigration.<sup>13</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Whole of government/national government leadership:</b> To support alignment, smart growth frameworks often feature a whole-of-government coordination structure and leadership from the centre of the national or regional government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>South Korea's</b> strategy was initially created with a Presidential Committee on an Aging Society and Population Policy, and as of 2024 is now led by a new Ministry of Population Strategy.<sup>14</sup></li> <li>President Abe's national framework in <b>Japan</b> had an identified lead with a Parliamentary Secretary in Cabinet Office.<sup>15</sup></li> </ul>

7 Auckland Council, "Auckland Plan 2050," 2018.

8 Tasmanian Government, "Tasmania's Population Policy: Planning for Our Future," 2024; Tasmanian Government, "Tasmania's Population Policy – Stage 1 Action Plan," 2024.

9 Scottish Government, "A Scotland for the Future: The Opportunities and Challenges of Scotland's Changing Population," 2021.

10 Regional Australia Institute, "Regionalisation Ambition 2032: A Framework to Rebalance the Nation," 2022.

11 Government of New Brunswick, "New Beginnings: A Population Growth Strategy for New Brunswick 2019-2024," 2019; Government of New Brunswick, "A Population Growth Action Plan for New Brunswick," 2019.

12 Government of Prince Edward Island, "Growing Together: A Population Framework for Prince Edward Island," 2024.

13 Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Live Here Work Here Belong Here: A Population Growth Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador, 2015-2025," 2015.

14 "Korea to Launch Population Ministry to Address Low Birth Rates and Aging Population - The Korea Times," accessed September 25, 2024, [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/09/113\\_377770.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/09/113_377770.html).

15 Cabinet Secretariat, "Regional Empowerment for Japan's Growth," 2015, [https://www.chisou.go.jp/sousei/info/pdf/panf\\_eng.pdf](https://www.chisou.go.jp/sousei/info/pdf/panf_eng.pdf).

## COMMON GOALS AND PRIORITIES

While the focus areas of population growth frameworks are tied to national objectives, there are a number of common themes that are found in countries with very different contexts.

Goals and priorities	Description
<b>Sustainability</b>	Frameworks in Australia, Singapore, and Finland feature an emphasis on integrating population growth objectives with sustainable infrastructure, healthcare, and environmental goals. <sup>16</sup>
<b>Regional development</b>	Many countries focus on ensuring population growth is balanced between urban centres and regional communities and rural areas. As part of this focus, some countries incorporate patterns of municipal and regional migration into their strategies and objectives. <sup>17</sup>
<b>Social cohesion</b>	Most frameworks include a strong emphasis on maintaining or strengthening social cohesion, particularly related to migration, ensuring that population growth supports inclusive and equitable societies. <sup>18</sup> This can include investments in settlement services, language programs, and community recreation infrastructure.
<b>Immigration policy</b>	Countries with low birth rates or aging populations, such as Japan, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, rely heavily on strategic immigration as a strategy to support economic growth. <sup>19</sup> Migration of working-age adults is seen as part of maintaining a sufficient workforce, including for the care work needed as the population ages.
<b>Life course approaches</b>	Countries and regions generally look at smart growth through the lens of supporting the whole life course, including the needs of young families, to migration of working age people, to healthy aging. <sup>20</sup>

- 16 National Population and Talent Division, "Our Sustainable Population Objectives," n.d., <https://www.population.gov.sg/our-population/overview/>; Tiia Sorsa, Sustainable Population Development in Finland: The 2020 Population Policy Report, The Family Federation of Finland, 2020, [https://www.vaestoliitto.fi/uploads/2021/01/ba9d7d0d-sustainable-population-development\\_2021\\_final.pdf](https://www.vaestoliitto.fi/uploads/2021/01/ba9d7d0d-sustainable-population-development_2021_final.pdf); Australian Government, "Planning for Australia's Future Population," 2019.
- 17 Regional Australia Institute, "Regionalisation Ambition 2032: A Framework to Rebalance the Nation"; Sorsa, Sustainable Population Development in Finland : The 2020 Population Policy Report; Northern Territory Government, "2018-28 Northern Territory Population Growth Strategy," 2018.
- 18 Auckland Council, "Auckland Plan 2050"; Australian Government, "Planning for Australia's Future Population."
- 19 Cabinet Secretariat, "Regional Empowerment for Japan's Growth"; Urvashi Yadav, "How Is Our Ageing Population Shaping the Future Workforce?," Business and Economic Research Ltd, 2023, <https://www.berl.co.nz/economic-insights/how-our-ageing-population-shaping-future-workforce>; M. Fernández-Reino and C. Rienzo, "Migrants in the UK Labour Market: An Overview.," 2024, [migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk).
- 20 Scottish Government, "A Scotland for the Future: Opportunities and Challenges of Scotland's Changing Population," Closing the Poverty-Related Attainment Gap: Progress Report 2016 to 2021, 2021, 1–253, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotland-future-opportunities-challenges-scotlands-changing-population/>; Anna Rotkirch, "Population Policy Guidelines for the 2020s Guidelines for the 2020s ", n.d.; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Live Here Work Here Belong Here: A Population Growth Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador, 2015-2025."

# A strong framework needs to be built around strong principles

The purpose of a national smart growth framework is to set the stage for Canada to grow *well*. A national framework is an opportunity to draw connections between the breadth of policy areas that impact population growth (and vice versa), and strategically plan for a thriving Canada of the future. For a national framework to meet these goals, it will need to address a core set of principles that are central to realizing smart, responsible growth.

Bringing together Century Initiative's decade of work on smart growth, the Canadian evidence on population growth trends and challenges, and promising approaches to population growth from around the globe, we have identified six principles that should guide a national framework for smart growth led by the federal government in partnership with provinces and territories, Indigenous peoples, local governments and the private and community sectors.

The purpose of a national smart growth framework is to set the stage for Canada to grow well



**Principle 1: Economic resilience**



**Principle 2: Inclusive and sustainable communities**



**Principle 3: Strategic immigration**



**Principle 4: Regional development and partnerships**



**Principle 5: Future-oriented and evidence-informed planning**



**Principle 6: Global partnerships and national security**





## PRINCIPLE 1:

# Economic resilience

---

**Smart growth is part of a broader strategy to support a thriving economy that creates high quality jobs and shared prosperity for all Canadians.**

A smart growth approach can help ensure that population growth enhances Canada's **economic capacity**, while also ensuring that all segments of the population can contribute to and benefit from economic and social progress. Investing in economic resilience has a reinforcing effort: national economic sustainability and productivity are key drivers of global investment and competitive advantage.

Economic resilience is only possible through building a **sustainable skilled workforce**. Canada's labour market has been drastically changing and will continue to do so as we face the impacts of climate change, disruptive technologies, and an aging population, among other global trends. This creates an urgent need for a working-age population that has in-demand and transferable skills and can be retained and/or reskilled for the workforce of the future.

A long-term smart growth framework includes investments that are resilient to this change, starting in the early years, not only near-term labour market strategies for near-term opportunities. Canada's social programs and economic vitality will depend on shifting way from our current focus on filling short-term labour needs in favour of long-term human capital. A smart growth strategy should target higher productivity, higher per capita growth, and a dynamic and innovative economy.

There are many parallel pathways to make this workforce a reality. A national framework should consider the relationships with **education and training opportunities**, access to **good jobs** (e.g., with fair wages, safe working conditions, job security), and **permanent settlement** for people with full labour mobility rights. Part of this work will be to better leverage the skills of equity-seeking groups who are under-represented in the workforce— like women, people with disabilities, and Indigenous people —by ensuring economic opportunities meet their needs.



## PRINCIPLE 2:

# Inclusive and sustainable communities

---

**Connected communities, along with equitable access to services, resources, and social systems, are essential parts of smart growth and an inclusive democracy.**

Smart population growth should strive to make Canada a place where people can live, work, and grow successfully. Policies and programs must be designed to foster cultural integration and social cohesion, especially for newcomers, and to support wellbeing across the life course, considering the needs of children and youth, families, and our aging population. This underscores that a national growth framework is not just about immigration or birth rates; it must contend with policy areas like civic engagement, community safety, childcare, parental leave, and retirement income.

Sustainable communities are also those where services and physical infrastructure are scaled to match need and ambition. This includes services and infrastructure directly related to population growth (e.g., newcomer supports, workforce development) as well as broader social systems (e.g., transportation, education). It also connects to two community features that should be prioritized in a national framework: an adequate and affordable housing supply and climate resilient infrastructure.

Canadians are understandably concerned that population growth may accelerate social challenges like rising housing costs, long wait times for healthcare, and overcrowded schools — and many areas of Canada are facing these pressures already. We share these concerns but would caution against tying immigration to any one specific metric. Strong leadership requires an integrated approach that scales up our ability to support growth, through investments in housing, roads, transit, and other enabling infrastructure, rather than *scaling down* growth itself



### PRINCIPLE 3:

## Strategic immigration

**Immigration should be incorporated as a core tool for smart growth, recognizing its role in economic development, demographic renewal, and cultural diversity.**

Canada has a long-standing reputation as a place that welcomes immigrants and prospers through permanent immigration. But a new trend is emerging: Canada has seen recent declines in both public support for immigration and its citizenship acquisition rate.<sup>21</sup> These metrics tell us that we are at a pivotal moment for **immigration policy** – and that a national framework has an opportunity to make strategic immigration decisions that get us back on track.

A core objective of a smart growth framework should be to develop clear **pathways to permanent residency** with an emphasis on high skill human capital. In recent years temporary residents have outpaced new permanent residents and make up a large share of essential sectors.<sup>22</sup> Despite these contributions, temporary residents face a difficult road to attaining permanent status, marked by procedural and policy barriers.

► **Changes to the temporary foreign worker program have been front-and-centre in public and policy dialogue.** In an October 2024 op-ed, Senator Ratna Omidvar -- who chairs the Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology – writes: *“A more comprehensive strategy is essential – one that considers the diverse needs of industries, the rights and well-being of workers and the long-term economic implications of our immigration policies. Without such an approach, we risk creating more problems than we solve.”*

Strategic immigration is about more than revising immigration pathways. It involves advancing policies to **attract global talent** and enhance Canada’s **competitiveness in the global economy**. Immigration plays a major role in innovation and entrepreneurship: immigrants are more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities and to start high-growth firms with stronger international trade connections.<sup>23</sup> To attract this type of talent, entrepreneurship and emerging industries need greater recognition in immigration policy, while Canada’s business and technology environment needs to be strengthened as a destination for innovation.

21 Century Initiative, “National Scorecard on Canada’s Growth and Prosperity - 4th Edition.”

22 Century Initiative; Garnett Picot and Tahsin Mehdi, “Economic and Social Reports The Provision of Higher- and Lower-Skilled Immigrant Labour to the Canadian Economy,” no. 36 (2024).

23 Century Initiative, “Driving Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Canada: The Benefits of Immigration,” 2021, [www.centuryinitiative.ca](http://www.centuryinitiative.ca).





#### PRINCIPLE 4:

## Regional development and partnerships

**A smart growth framework needs to be responsive to regional priorities and work with provinces and territories, Indigenous nations, and local communities as key partners.**

While national in scope, a smart growth framework cannot ignore the diversity of smart growth needs across Canada. Within the framework, **tailored regional strategies** are necessary to recognize that each region — and even each community — has distinct labour market needs, economic capacity, and infrastructure priorities. What drives social and economic prosperity in a fly-in Nunavut community will not be the same as in an Alberta oil town or the urban centres of Ontario.

This is especially true for Indigenous communities, where a smart growth framework must work to advance **reconciliation** and Indigenous **self-determination**. The objectives of a national framework must reflect the objectives of Indigenous nations, including addressing the major infrastructure and service gaps between the North and the rest of Canada. Indigenous engagement on smart growth is about more than upholding obligations to consultation and treaty rights; it is an opportunity to build capacity and support self-determination of Indigenous peoples.

Some places in Canada are already doing valuable work on smart growth, leading the way with their own **provincial population growth strategies**. From New Brunswick to Alberta to Prince Edward Island, several jurisdictions across Canada have set out goals and priorities for population growth, highlighting the need for a national direction that ties this work together.<sup>24</sup> A national framework can look to these examples for strong ideas, regional priorities, and coordination opportunities, especially as population growth and its impacts can vary drastically between regions, with some areas of Canada rapidly growing and others experiencing population declines. Partnerships are critical here: the federal government and provinces and territories have many overlapping areas of responsibility and mutual dependence when it comes to smart growth and a national framework will not move forward without provincial and territorial support.

A national framework can also see the bigger picture on regional development. Taking a national view on regional issues can support **balanced population growth** across interested urban centres, smaller cities, and rural and remote areas. This involves managing pressures on major metropolitan areas while ensuring economic benefit and opportunity reaches smaller communities.

24 Government of New Brunswick, "New Beginnings: A Population Growth Strategy for New Brunswick 2019-2024"; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, "Live Here Work Here Belong Here: A Population Growth Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador, 2015-2025"; Government of Prince Edward Island, "Growing Together: A Population Framework for Prince Edward Island"; Business Council of Alberta, "Delivering the Promise: A Framework and Action Plan for a Prosperity-Driven Immigration System for Canada," 2024; City of Saint John, "City of Saint John Population Growth Framework," 2021.



## PRINCIPLE 5:

# Future-oriented and evidence-informed planning

**Policy decisions and resources for smart growth must look beyond immediate needs and make ambitious, evidence-informed investments to support future generations.**

The fate of future generations will be determined by the choices made today. Canada's approach to smart growth policies should prioritize **long-term planning**, working toward economic and environmental conditions that can sustain prosperity.

This future-oriented lens relies on **robust evidence** and **cross-government coordination**. Using reliable data to make decisions and measure impact — and reporting on these transparently — will help Canada to monitor progress, anticipate needs, and be accountable to the public. Collaborating across governments will help ensure that policies are aligned and that resources are shared, and perhaps more importantly, that intergovernmental relationships are in place to act on population growth challenges spanning multiple jurisdictions' responsibilities, like healthcare delivery, community housing, or employment services.

Planning for tomorrow also means building in **flexibility**: policies need to be responsive to changing population structures, ready to adapt to shifts in birth rates, immigration trends, and other demographic changes. A national framework must set mechanisms and timelines to revisit policy directions and change course in line with new context and evidence.

Smart growth frameworks should build in creative **democratic engagement** that builds partnerships with communities, businesses and other stakeholders. A long-term framework should proactively engage the perspectives of children and young people who are often left out of consultations but will live with the results of long-term policy choices.



## PRINCIPLE 6:

# Global partnerships and national security

**Smart growth is an opportunity to recognize and advance international commitments and respond to an evolving global security landscape.**

Canada has a role to play on the global stage in both advancing climate and human rights commitments and upholding national security. But when it comes to global activities, being an influential player depends on a strong economy and international reputation. While Canada's counterparts have started to act on the links between economic prosperity and national security — for example, strengthening protections in trade, telecommunications, or energy systems — Canada has not been keeping up.<sup>25</sup> This opens us up to direct risks (e.g., cyberattacks) and indirect consequences (e.g., weakened international relationships) in the realm of national security, limiting progress on other social and economic goals and obligations.

At the same time, global migration patterns are changing, and a national framework can ensure that Canada stays ahead of the curve on both leveraging the opportunities and mitigating the risks that these changes bring. Conflict, violence, and disaster have driven rapid increases in displaced individuals and international migration. Because of this, smart growth policies must account for Canada's legal responsibilities for **refugee resettlement** and responding to humanitarian needs when setting other population growth targets and pathways. Similar thinking is needed around **sustainable development**, where on the one hand, climate change may mean a growing influx of climate refugees for the foreseeable future, while on the other hand, population growth cannot move Canada away from meeting climate action targets and Sustainable Development Goals. This will be a complex balancing act for a smart growth framework to grapple with.

A national framework will also need to strike the right balance between the **benefits of immigration for national security** (and not just immigrants' significant contributions to relevant industries) and the **national security threats** that immigration can introduce. The current geopolitical context is creating heightened economic competition — and bad actors are increasingly using cyberattacks, espionage, and foreign interference to get ahead.<sup>26</sup> Canada must continue and advance evidence-based screening practices as part of its immigration system to effectively mitigate these risks. At the same time, national security concerns should not act as a deterrent to population growth: innovation and technology advancements are central to strong national security infrastructure, and immigration is a major force for strengthening Canada's innovation landscape.

25 Business Council of Canada, "Economic Security Is National Security: The Case for an Integrated Canadian Strategy," 2022.

26 Business Council of Canada.





## Moving forward

Century Initiative's vision for a national smart growth framework is just the beginning. There is work ahead to refine these principles and complement them with practical policy solutions to make smart growth a reality for Canada's future. Advancing smart growth is a cross-sector effort, and Century Initiative can leverage its existing relationships to bring together provinces and territories, Indigenous governments, local and regional authorities, community organizations, and private sector partners (from across housing and infrastructure, innovation and technology, and other core industries) for action.

Some smart growth solutions are ready to be put in motion today, like working with the federal government to bring these principles into upcoming immigration levels planning, and more formally incorporate a national framework into future planning cycles. Others will require longer-term collaboration and solutions exploration, like identifying options for connected planning on housing, infrastructure, and immigration that do not hold us back from economic growth. Century Initiative is ready to be at the table with government and cross-sector partners to design and implement a national smart growth framework that sets Canada up for economic and social prosperity.